

Nadler Introduces Bill to Stop Schoolyard Bullying

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New York -- Congressman Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) today introduced the "Antibullying Campaign Act of 2004," legislation that seeks to protect the nearly five million children that are physically or verbally threatened by other students each year. At an area schoolyard, Nadler was joined by other supporters of the legislation, including Randi Weingarten, President of the United Federation of Teachers, Aja Giles, a student who is a victim of bullying, and representatives of the United Parents Association, Education Equity Concepts, the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN), the Girl Scouts of America, and the Hetrick-Martin Institute.

Nadler's statement at the press conference follows:

I would like to thank you all for coming today to discuss the important issue of school bullying. I'd like to thank Randi Weingarten, President of the United Federation of Teachers, Aja Giles, a victim of bullying who has graciously agreed to share her story with us today, as well as representatives from the United Parents Association, Education Equity Concepts, GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network, the Girl Scouts of America, and the Hetrick-Martin Institute for attending. Harassment directed at our nation's youth is prevalent in our schools and is an increasingly dangerous problem.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, nearly 5 million children are physically or verbally threatened by another student every year, and as many as half of all children are bullied at some time during their school years. 160,000 students stay home from school every day for fear of being bullied. Yet, many incidents of harassment and bullying are unreported, due to a fear that nothing will be done, or that the student will experience retaliation if the initial incident is reported. Students who are harassed are more likely to suffer from depression, attempt suicide, carry a weapon to school, use drugs, smoke cigarettes, and drink alcohol. Clearly, school bullying and harassment threaten our children's safety and health.

Those who bully others are more apt to commit crimes later in life. A recent survey conducted by "Fight Crimes: Invest in Kids" states that almost 60 percent of boys who bullied other kids between grades six through nine were convicted of a crime at least once by the age of 24, and 40 percent were convicted of a crime three or more times by 24. We must help to prevent bullying not only to protect those who are bullied, but also to protect those children who feel they need to bully others.

Today, I am pleased to announce that I recently introduced the Antibullying Campaign Act of 2004, specifically to address the problem of harassment in our nation's schools. The Antibullying Campaign Act would authorize a four-year, \$300 million matching program for the federal government to provide grants to states, either to establish or continue their antiharassment programs in elementary and secondary schools. In order to be eligible to receive the matching funds, states are required to protect all students against bullying, regardless of race, creed, religion, disability, gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

Right now, we don't have the resources to combat bullying. Our teachers already face the difficult task of teaching classes with thirty or more children. This environment simply is not conducive to recognizing and stopping bullying. Funding is necessary to ensure that our schools have the means to know when an intervention is necessary to protect our kids.

In addition to providing matching funds, the Antibullying Campaign Act of 2004 would require the Secretary of Education to conduct a four-year study concerning harassment in our public schools and report the findings to Congress annually. With millions of children experiencing problems with bullies at school, it is clear that more research is needed to document the school-related experiences of our nation's youth.

I am here today to say that school bullying cannot and will not be tolerated any longer. The health and well being of our children depend on it.

Thank you all for attending today's press conference. Together, we will work to end bullying in our nation's schools.

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